

Planning Collaboration Initiative Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration

Conference Call Summary for March 18, 2003

Topic: Transportation Management Area (TMA) Planning Certification Reviews

The first round of conference calls for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Planning Collaboration Initiative (PCI) continued on March 18, 2003 with a discussion of Transportation Management Area (TMA) Planning Certification reviews. This was the fourth of 15 conference calls to discuss the drafting of a National Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between FHWA and FTA. David Kuehn of FHWA Headquarters and Jesse Balleza of FTA Region 6 facilitated the discussion. Vince Valdes of FTA Headquarters, Peter Butler of FTA Region 1, and Robin Mayhew of FHWA Headquarters represented the PCI Team on the conference call. Terry Rosapep of FTA Headquarters and Danyell Diggs and Robin Smith of FHWA Headquarters also participated in the call. The Volpe Center was represented on the call by Kate Fichter.

Representatives from the following field offices participated in this fourth call:

- ◆ FTA Region 1
- ◆ FTA Region 3
- ◆ FTA Region 4
- ◆ FTA Region 6
- ◆ FTA Region 7
- ◆ FTA Region 9
- ◆ FHWA Arizona Division
- ◆ FHWA California Division
- ◆ FHWA Connecticut Division
- ◆ FHWA Florida Division
- ◆ FHWA Illinois Division
- ◆ FHWA Michigan Division
- ◆ FHWA Minnesota Division
- ◆ FHWA Mississippi Division
- ◆ FHWA Nebraska Division
- ◆ FHWA New Jersey Division
- ◆ FHWA New York Division
- ◆ FHWA North Carolina Division
- ◆ FHWA Ohio Division
- ◆ FHWA Pennsylvania Division
- ◆ FHWA Tennessee Division
- ◆ FHWA Wisconsin Division
- ◆ Washington, DC Metro Office

This summary captures discussion and recommendations from the conference call on the following matters: (1) the PCI outreach process (2) the limited staff resources available for the preparation of TMA planning certification documents (3) the potential to standardize the materials used in the TMA planning certification process, (4) roles and responsibilities of FHWA and FTA in the TMA planning certification process, (5) coordination and communication during the TMA process, and (6) a synopsis of all recommendations offered for improved collaboration on the TMA planning certification process. This summary also includes a list of other issues that arose during the conference call and should be addressed, but were not immediately relevant to the discussion of TMA planning certification reviews (see *Parking Lot/Bus Stop* issues).

OVERALL COMMENTS ABOUT THE PCI OUTREACH PROCESS

The facilitators of the conference call reiterated that the PCI discussions are intended to be a forum to discuss issues of collaboration between FHWA and FTA, not on substantive issues

about the details of particular planning programs. One of the recommended outcomes to be made at the completion of the PCI process will be for FHWA and FTA to hold future conference calls to discuss the substance of specific issues.

COMMENTS ABOUT TMA PLANNING CERTIFICATION REVIEWS

The conference call participants identified a number of issues about the process of conducting planning certification reviews and preparing the final planning certification report, and offered a number of recommendations for making the planning certification process more efficient and effective. Four primary issue areas were discussed:

- A. Limited staff resources
- B. Materials used in the TMA planning certification process
- C. Roles and responsibilities
- D. Coordination and communication

A. Limited Staff Resources

The planning certification process for TMAs is a lengthy one, requiring a significant commitment of Field office staff time and effort for completion. For many Field offices, the TMA planning certification process is one of the largest and most challenging planning tasks, and some Field offices struggle to commit sufficient staff resources to prepare the final planning certification report in a timely manner. Call participants discussed the challenge of meeting the requirements of the TMA planning certification process in a timely fashion while still maintaining the quality of the final planning certification materials and devoting time to working with each MPO individually.

The following is a list of examples, offered during the conference call, of successful practices used to manage the FHWA and FTA staff resource needs required by the TMA planning certification process:

1. The Tennessee Division has found that some MPOs benefit from receiving a planning certification review more often than on the required triennial schedule. Reviewing certain MPOs on a more frequent basis can help to make each review shorter, more manageable, and more targeted to the needs of the individual MPOs.
2. In Texas, staff members from FHWA and FTA meet every June to prepare a calendar of the planning certification reviews required for the coming year. This process allows the staff from each agency to plan their time, in advance, in order to accommodate the needs of the planning certification process and to plan for the appropriate allocation of resources.
3. The California Division has recently established a schedule for performing one TMA planning certification review each summer and two reviews each autumn. This established schedule makes it possible for the staff members to plan their workloads and better manage the timetable of the planning certification review process.
4. Both Region 1 and Region 6 have experimented with having the MPOs prepare written, factual statements for submission to FTA and FHWA prior to the commencement of the planning certification review process. These statements can include information about

the demographics of the MPO area and about the statutory designation of the MPO. To receive this kind of background information in advance leaves the review meetings open for focused, in-depth discussions of substantive issues and reduces the use of FHWA and FTA staff time.

5. Since being able to hire additional members for its planning staff, Region 6 has been able to take the lead for many more TMA planning certification reviews and participate as a more active partner in other planning certification reviews.

The following recommendations for managing the staff resource needs of the TMA planning certification process were made to the PCI Team:

- Consider establishing a reasonable timeline for the completion of the tasks associated with the TMA planning certification process, one that takes into account the available resources and relative workloads of FHWA and FTA.
- Draw upon the knowledge of Division and Regional offices that have worked with contractors in the past to learn from their experiences.
- Encourage the submittal of written factual reports by MPOs prior to the planning certification meetings.
- Consider developing a pilot program in which Division and Regional offices could hire contractors to produce the final TMA planning certification reports.

B. Materials Used in the TMA Planning Certification Process

Some participants discussed the value of making standardized materials – such as template report formats and generic timelines – available to the Field offices, while others expressed concern that such materials would oblige the Field offices to treat all MPOs identically, without regard for individual needs. Participants urged the involvement of Field staff in the development of any standard TMA planning certification materials.

The following is a list of examples, offered during the conference call, of successful practices used to try to standardize the materials used during the TMA planning certification process:

1. In the early-mid 1990s, FHWA/FTA made available a series of outlines that could be used by Field offices to model agendas and reports for the TMA planning certification process.
2. More recently, FHWA/FTA prepared a handbook of guidance on the TMA planning certification process, including some template examples.

The following recommendations for developing standard TMA planning certification materials were made to the PCI Team:

- Provide template materials for use by the Field offices in the TMA planning certification review process, including templates for letters, agendas, and the final planning certification report. These materials could provide basic outlines for TMA planning certification materials and also allow Field offices to modify and add to them as necessary to respond to the diverse situations of individual MPOs.

- Review outlines for agendas and reports that were distributed by FHWA in the early-mid 1990s for ideas for new templates.
- Consider establishing minimum standards of consistency for the contents and design of the final TMA planning certification report (for use in all Divisions and Regions) in order to streamline the planning certification process and avoid the impression that some MPOs receive 'special' treatment.

C. Roles and Responsibilities

Call participants discussed the different roles that FHWA and FTA play in the TMA planning certification process, with many indicating that FHWA will generally take the lead on most reviews. In some cases, FTA will lead those reviews of transit-heavy regions, particularly large metropolitan areas (Philadelphia was cited as an example. This area has an FHWA/FTA Metropolitan Office). Many areas of the country have existing MOUs that delineate the relationship between FHWA and FTA on TMA planning certification, and others have developed informal working relationships that guide them in their planning certifications. To have the roles and responsibilities of FTA and FHWA clearly defined allows the lengthy planning certification process to be more efficient and collaborative than it might otherwise be.

The following is a list of examples, offered during the conference call, of successful practices used to define roles and responsibilities between FHWA and FTA on the TMA planning certification process:

1. In Florida, FHWA and FTA have an agreement that allows FHWA to lead all TMA planning certification reviews except those for which FTA explicitly requests to be the lead. Regardless of the lead agency, all reviews are treated as a joint undertaking.
2. The California Division has found it helpful to share with FTA the responsibility for the logistical details of the TMA review process such as setting the schedule, reserving the meeting rooms, and coordinating with attendees. This helps to keep the workload manageable and makes the process feel collaborative.

The following recommendation for defining roles and responsibilities was made to the PCI Team:

- Develop a protocol for the identification of the lead agency on TMA reviews, one that recognizes the needs of both agencies.

D. Coordination and Communication

As the TMA planning certification is a lengthy and intensive process, good coordination and communication between FHWA and FTA is key to making the process smooth and efficient. Participants discussed the delays that can sometimes occur between the two agencies in receiving final signatures on TMA planning certification reports, and identified potential ways to streamline the overall process. Lastly, participants indicated that the process of developing final TMA planning certification reports can sometimes be slowed by the involvement, late in the process, of individuals who were not present at the original review meetings.

The following is a list of examples, offered during the conference call, of successful practices

used to improve coordination and communication between FHWA and FTA on the TMA planning certification process:

1. Texas has partnered with Oklahoma and other nearby states to allow planners to circulate between the Division offices as part of their on-the-job training. This is a way for planners to develop a network of relationships across the region and to develop an appreciation for the different planning issues in different states.
2. Also in Texas, the FHWA and FTA staffs have developed a mechanism for sharing draft versions of the TMA planning certification reports through e-mail. Using the tools of computerized editing, the two staffs are able to effectively collaborate on shared documents.
3. Region 1 has found that collaborative, upfront discussions between FHWA and FTA about the contents of the final planning certification report can speed the process of completing and receiving signatures on the report.

The following recommendations for improving coordination and communication were made to the PCI Team:

- Encourage early collaboration between FHWA and FTA on the TMA planning certification process, particularly on the final report.
- Encourage the early participation of Division Administrators and Regional Administrators in the drafting of TMA planning certification materials as a way to streamline the final review processes.
- Consider mechanisms to encourage the inclusion in the TMA report of only those issues that were raised during the TMA review itself.
- Consider developing a protocol for single-signature TMA reports.
- Support cross-office information sharing and staff exchanges.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following list restates the recommendations on the topic of TMA planning certification review processes offered for consideration:

- Consider establishing a reasonable timeline for the completion of the tasks associated with the TMA planning certification process, one that takes into account the available resources and relative workloads of FHWA and FTA.
- Consider making funds available for Division and Regional offices to hire contractors – perhaps on a pilot basis – to produce the final TMA planning certification reports, based on standardized templates.
- Draw upon the knowledge of Division and Regional offices that have worked with contractors in the past to learn from their experiences.
- Encourage the submittal of written factual reports by MPOs prior to the planning certification meetings.
- Encourage the hiring of additional FTA planners.
- Consider providing template materials for use by the Field offices in the TMA planning certification review process, including templates for letters, agendas, and the final

planning certification report. These materials could provide basic outlines for TMA planning certification materials and also allow Field offices to modify and add to them as necessary to respond to the diverse situations of individual MPOs.

- Review past guidance distributed in the early-mid 1990s for a report template.
- Consider establishing minimum standards of consistency for the contents and design of the final TMA planning certification report (for use in all Divisions and Regions) in order to streamline the planning certification process and avoid the impression that some MPOs receive ‘special’ treatment.
- Consider developing a protocol for the identification of the lead agency on TMA reviews, one that recognizes the needs of both agencies.
- Consider mechanisms to encourage early collaboration between FHWA and FTA on the TMA planning certification process, particularly on the final report.
- Consider mechanisms to encourage the early participation of Division Administrators and Regional Administrators in the drafting of TMA planning certification materials as a way to streamline the final review processes.
- Consider mechanisms to encourage the inclusion in the TMA report of only those issues that were raised during the TMA review itself.
- Consider developing a protocol for single-signature TMA reports.
- Support cross-office information sharing and staff exchanges.

PARKING LOT/BUS STOP ISSUES

The following issue arose during the conference call and should be addressed, but were not immediately relevant to the discussion of TMA planning certification review:

- The possibility of establishing a two-tiered TMA review process, in which:
 - Tier 1 would be an infrequent planning certification review for MPOs without any significant problems, and
 - Tier 2 would be a more frequent planning certification review for MPOs “at risk” and in need of in-depth assistance